The Progressive Review

Nbr 345
October 1996

Washington's most unofficial source

Pathological politics

It happened in Houston, TX, but it might as well been Washington. As the AP reported it:

> The woman facing retrial on charges she tried to hire a hit man to kill the mother of her daughter's cheerleading rival pleaded no contest yesterday and received a ten-year prison sentence. ~ [Her lawyer said Wanda Webb Holloway] "felt this morning that this is the proper resolution. She never wanted anyone harmed." ~ Authorities said Mrs. Holloway hoped Mrs. Heath would die so that her 13-year-old daughter, Amber, would be too upset to make her junior high school cheer-leading team. They said Mrs. Holloway believed her own daughter, Shanna Harper, would have a better chance of making the squad in that case. Both girls were 13. ~ Actress Holly Hunter played Mrs. Holloway in a HBO comedy movie version of the case.

Much of Washington's elite would agree that anything is permissible as long as its purpose is to win, anything is forgivable as long as wrongful intent is disclaimed, and anything -- even if it isn't permissible or forgivable -- can at least be made profitable.

Thus it's not all that surprising to find ourselves approaching a election in which the apparent victor will be the most corrupt Democratic presidential candidate in history and the most reactionary of modern times, whose top campaign strategist turns out to be a slurper of toes and spiller of beans, and whose campaign manager is a foreign lobbyist who beat back human rights complaints about holding the next Olympics in China. We are being asked to vote for a man whose cabinet officials spawn special prosecutors like guppies spawn little guppies and whose own friends, aides, and business partners are going before grand juries and into prison with a frequency that approaches the diarrhetic.

Meanwhile, convicted Whitewater crook and former Clinton business partner Susan McDougal is featured on TV by a fawning Larry King and a similarly obsequious Brian Gumbel, the latter ending his hard-hitting massage with, "We wish you well." Meanwhile the toe sucker gets a $2.5 million book contract. And meanwhile -- despite indictments, convictions, sworn testimony, and evidence normally good enough to satisfy the most timorous editor -- we are told that those who see the Clintons in other than presidential terms are liars and that those who report these lies are wackos beneath contempt.

The problem is that the facts won't go away. Vincent Foster is still dead under unknown circumstances. There is still no rational explanation for Hillary Clinton's winnings in cattle futures. And even though, for example, presidential sycophant Lars-Erik Nelson promised readers in the *LA Times* last April that "the Whitewater 'scandal' is dying out in wisps of smoke," and that Mena is a "favorite of conspiracy nuts," they are still with us, stronger than ever.

As the evidence mounts, the media continues to suck the president's toes and engage in an unprecedented attack on those who won't join the fun -- becoming even more vociferous as the case against the president solidifies. Earlier this year the typical effort tried only to minimize the Clinton's behavior. From Al Hunt of the Wall Street Journal: "The oft-repeated analogies to Watergate are like comparing a jaywalker to the Boston Strangler." Or from Diane Rehm, NPR's bodyguard to the status quo: "Any effort to compare this to Watergate is ridiculous."

But as revelatory books such as *Partners in Power* made it to the best-seller list, a more frantic tone has emerged. Here, for example, is Gene Lyons in the *New York Review of Books*: "Almost every sentence regarding Whitewater in *Partners in Power* is similarly irresponsible."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Progressive Review
Not affiliated with any major corporation

The Progressive Review is published 10 times a year. Formerly the DC Gazette. One year subscription: $18. Two year subscription: $32. Single copies: $2.00..

Editor: Sam Smith
The Progressive Review
1739 Connecticut Ave NW
Washington DC 20009
202-232-5544
Fax Nbr: 202-234-6222

Internet: ssmith@igc. org
CompuServe: 72067,1525
ISSN 0889-2202

Hotline: If you are a subscriber we will add you to our on-line hotline. Send your e-mail address to either of the addresses above.

Become a supporting subscriber: Many small circulation publications keep going with the help of supporting subscribers who contribute a sum in addition to their regular subscription to aid the publication in its work. We will be grateful if you indicate your support of our efforts by subscribing or renewing with a contribution above the normal fee or by sending us a contribution today.

Help spread the word: To introduce the Review to friends through a free trial subscription, just write their names and addresses on a postcard and send it to the Review.

Home page: The Review's Web site is located at
http://emporium.turnpike.net/P/ProRev/

Copyright 1996, The Progressive Review. Articles not otherwise copyrighted may be reprinted by other periodicals provided they give proper credit and pay their normal reprint fees, if any.

When the media establishment becomes so carelessly defamatory, when facts lose their meaning, when normal investigative journalistic enterprise is routinely ridiculed, when felonies are celebrated on national TV, secret files passed around the White House like dirty jokes, presidential corruption condoned, obstruction of justice ignored and chronic sexual abuse dismissed, you know you are now longer dealing with standard deviations of politics. You are now mired in real pathology. Whitewater, on top of all its other sins, has helped to make Washington a very sick place.

🕮

That such a pathology has developed virtually unimpeded reflects among other things the degree to which the lines between those in power and those writing about them have become smudged or erased. When I started out in this racket, any reporter who regarded a politician with other than extreme skepticism was considered dumb, drunk or on the take. Today a lack of skepticism is regarded as the necessary admission price for access. Blending comfortably with those you write about, you not only earn their trust (as well as an occasional exclusive bromide) but you start to share their power -- you become what you write.

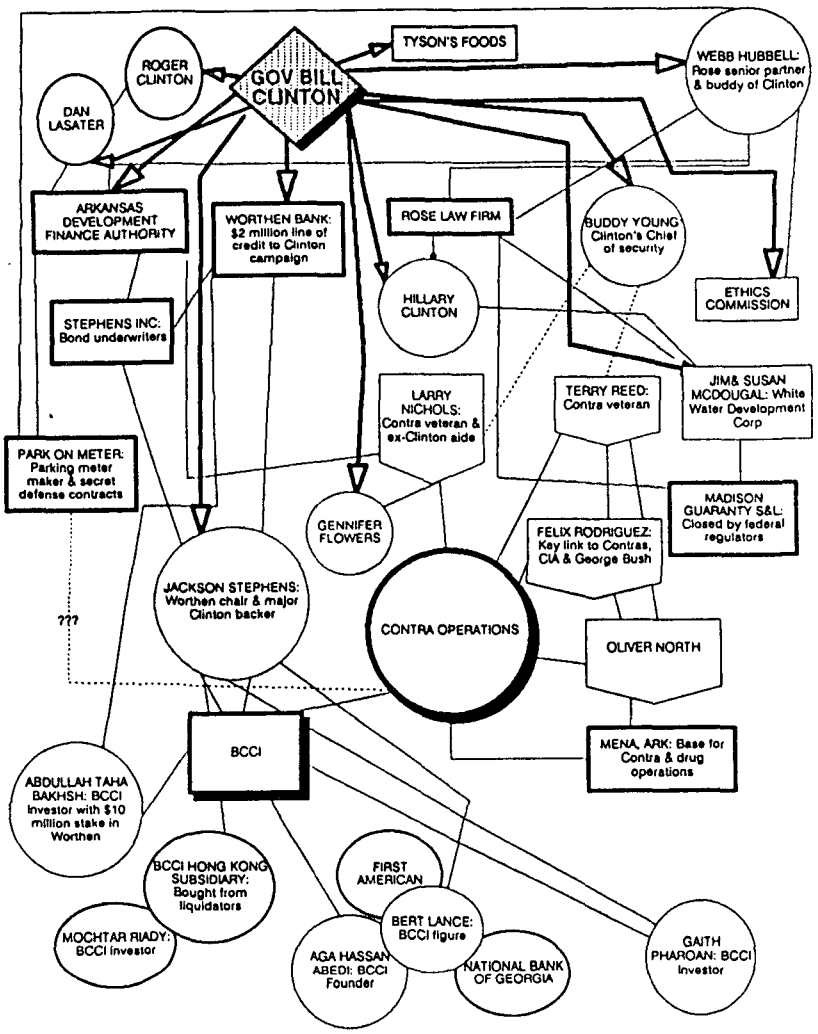
For many journalists it would be difficult, at this late date, to pull the plug on the Clintons. To do so would be to admit that they have, for four years or longer, been telling viewers and readers deep and dangerous falsehoods. Worse, these are falsehoods not produced by simple error, bad leads, disinformation or double-agents, but by the inevitable myopia of the fawning and the ambitious.

The exceptions have been largely on the right or British-born, the latter seeming to have a more natural feel for corruption. Those of us who do not fit either category are small in number, the most prominent of late being Roger Morris, author of *Partners in Power.*

Despite writing a best-seller that is also a damn good book, Morris has been treated with considerable contempt in places like *The Nation* and *The New York Review of Books.* For example, in the *NYRB* review, Gene Lyons described *Partners in Power* as "slipshod and manifestly fraudulent," and said that "there is scarcely a statement of fact anywhere . . . that can be taken at face value."

While Morris, the author of an award-winning biography of Nixon, well documented his devastating account of the Clintons, Lyons offered little in rebuttal but adjectives, *ex cathedra* statements, personal anecdotes of the I-know-Arkansas-better-than-this-guy variety and quotes from a single RTC report of limited scope that the Clintonites have rhetorically (and falsely)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED


GOV BILL CLINTON
ROGER CLINTON
DAN LASATER
TYSON'S FOODS
WEBB HUBBELL: Rose senior partner & buddy of Clinton
ARKANSAS DEVELOPMENT FINANCE AUTHORITY
WORTHEN BANK: $2 million line of credit to Clinton campaign
ROSE LAW FIRM
BUDDY YOUNG Clinton's Chief of security
ETHICS COMMISSION
STEPHENS INC: Bond underwriters
HILLARY CLINTON
LARRY NICHOLS: Contra veteran & ex-Clinton aide
TERRY REED: Contra veteran
JIM& SUSAN MCDOUGAL: White Water Development Corp
PARK ON METER: Parking meter maker & secret defense contracts
GENNIFER FLOWERS
MADISON GUARANTY S&L: Closed by federal regulators
FELIX RODRIGUEZ: Key link to Contras, CIA & George Bush
JACKSON STEPHENS: Worthen chair & major Clinton backer
???
CONTRA OPERATIONS
OLIVER NORTH
BCCI
MENA, ARK: Base for Contra & drug operations
ABDULLAH TAHA BAKHSH: BCCI investor with $10 million stake in Worthen
BCCI HONG KONG SUBSIDIARY: Bought from liquidators
FIRST AMERICAN
BERT LANCE: BCCI figure
MOCHTAR RIADY: BCCI investor
AGA HASSAN ABEDI: BCCI Founder
NATIONAL BANK OF GEORGIA
GAITH PHAROAN: BCCI Investor

The ARKANSAS FLOW CHART
that appeared in the Review's May 1992 edition

reconfigured into complete exculpation. But then Lyons was not out to elucidate; he was out to destroy.

Morris' experience has shed light on my own. I provided, in May 1992, the first comprehensive listing of dubious characters and institutions involved with the Clintons and subsequently wrote the first book critical of Clinton's character and its impact on American politics. I had only offered an impressionistic sketch where Morris would present a detailed brief, but the same liberal media mandarins who trashed Morris's book refused -- despite uniformly favorable reviews elsewhere -- to even recognize the existence of mine.

Since then, I have periodically felt the isolation of the apostate, the contempt for those who ask the wrong questions -- "Put a sock in it!" a reporter recently yelled at an inquiring Sarah McClendon at a White House news briefing -- and the implicit suggestion that I have joined a cult or in some other manner become slightly deranged. Things have even been more lively in cyberspace where one of Clinton's most persistent defenders on the Net imagined me to be "a card carrying member of the right wing" and a segregationist (in the latter instance apparently confusing me with another of alliterative appellation: Justice Jim Johnson.)

Morris has had it far worse. A fine piece of work has been demonized, often for the most puerile of political purposes. Morris is a historian who scours the past for old facts and broad contexts that are considered irrelevant, bizarre or verboten in today's news rooms. He also has a tendency to put these old facts and broad contexts together. Under today's journalistic rules, three or more uncomfortable facts placed in close association with one another is prima facie evidence of a conspiracy theory.

Not only am I likewise guilty of inappropriate fact association, I was raised on the notion that corruption, like sex, is among the most bipartisan of the arts. I believe that the reporters' job -- while possessing some of the moral ambiguity of a referee at an illegal cock fight -- is to attempt to tell the truth unvarnished by one's hopes at the time of the last (or next) election. The theory is -- and no one has proved otherwise -- that in the long run this works out to everyone's advantage.

I was reminded of the alternative, and more currently popular, theory the other day while appearing on a Washington public radio show. I had mentioned Whitewater as a matter of some importance in the coming weeks. The host, ABC news anchor Carol Simpson, quickly dismissed my comment by saying that polls showed that people weren't interested in Whitewater. Clearly I had forgotten that in postmodern America, news doesn't happen; it's something you get to choose. Or at least someone does.

In fact, at ABC at least, news itself may be disappearing. News anchor Peter Jennings asked Cokie Roberts on the air the other day, "What do you think the spin will be tomorrow?" As Paul Krassner points out, "It used to be the job of newscasters to tell you what happened. Now they predict how the propagandists will use the media to manipulate you."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yet the facts and the witnesses won't go away. To believe the Clintons, one must also believe that an astounding array of investigators, FBI agents, innocent witnesses to not so innocent events, federal regulators, state troopers, former business associates, law firm employees, harassed women, and investigative reporters are all chronic liars. In fact at the heart of the president's defense is the biggest conspiracy theory of them all: that somehow (and for unspecified reasons) there has been an enormous, unprecedented, and organized effort to portray the Clintons unfavorably, and that their associations with crooks, drug dealers, financial scam artists, contra arms suppliers, dirty tricksters, and others of minimal repute are at worst coincidental or at best false or a GOP plant.

Life without a smoking gun

The White House and the media keep demanding a smoking gun before we reach conclusions contrary to their own. But democracy doesn't require smoking guns; democracy requires reasonable judgments and a preponderance of facts and it *deserves* not even having to worry about such things. There really was a time when the lack of indictments was considered a less than adequate platform on which to run for high office. There really was a time when even having to ask so many questions provided much of the answer.

Here, for example, is just a sample of the things we already know about the Clintons and Whitewater, without waiting for any more indictments or reports -- or for a smoking gun:

☞ Whitewater began as a real estate scam. The Clintons joined in partnership with the McDougals to sell inaccessible, third-rate plots of land to the unwary using a financing scheme guaranteed to profit the owners even if buyers defaulted. About half of them did. Before a single Whitewater investigation, story, or allegation comes this simple fact: we elected to the White House a couple whose business avocation was ripping off unsuspecting land purchasers.

☞ Fourteen of the Clinton's close friends or business associates have so far pleaded guilty or have been convicted of felonies or misdemeanors.

☞ The White House falsely accused seven staffers of its travel office of mismanagement and kickbacks. The director was actually put on trial -- and acquitted.

☞ Clinton was governor of Arkansas -- a state smaller than the Washington metropolitan area -- during a time when huge quantities of drugs were being imported and the proceeds of same were laundered through Arkansas institutions of various sorts. He refused to investigate or take action against this drug trade.

☞ Bill Clinton has treated women in a manner that would disqualify him for employment in most corporations or by the US Civil Service.

☞ Hillary Clinton made profits in cattle futures trading that were virtually impossible to accomplish in a legal fashion.

☞ The circumstances surrounding Vince Foster's death remain unresolved.

☞ Hillary Clinton has been called to testify before a criminal grand jury after her fingerprints were found on documents which turned up in the White House two years after they had been subpoenaed by federal authorities.

☞ A number of major anomalies remain in the Ron Brown plane crash. These include dramatically differing accounts of the weather at the time of the crash, questions concerning the alleged suicide of a control tower staffer, and the disappearance of control tower data tapes.

☞ The Clintons' staff obstructed the inquiry into the Vince Foster death.

☞ The White House has been repeatedly recalcitrant, misleading and unforthcoming in connection with various congressional investigations.

☞ A former Clinton security guard, known to have compiled a dossier on Clinton, was killed in the manner of a mob hit and his house was divested of its archives.

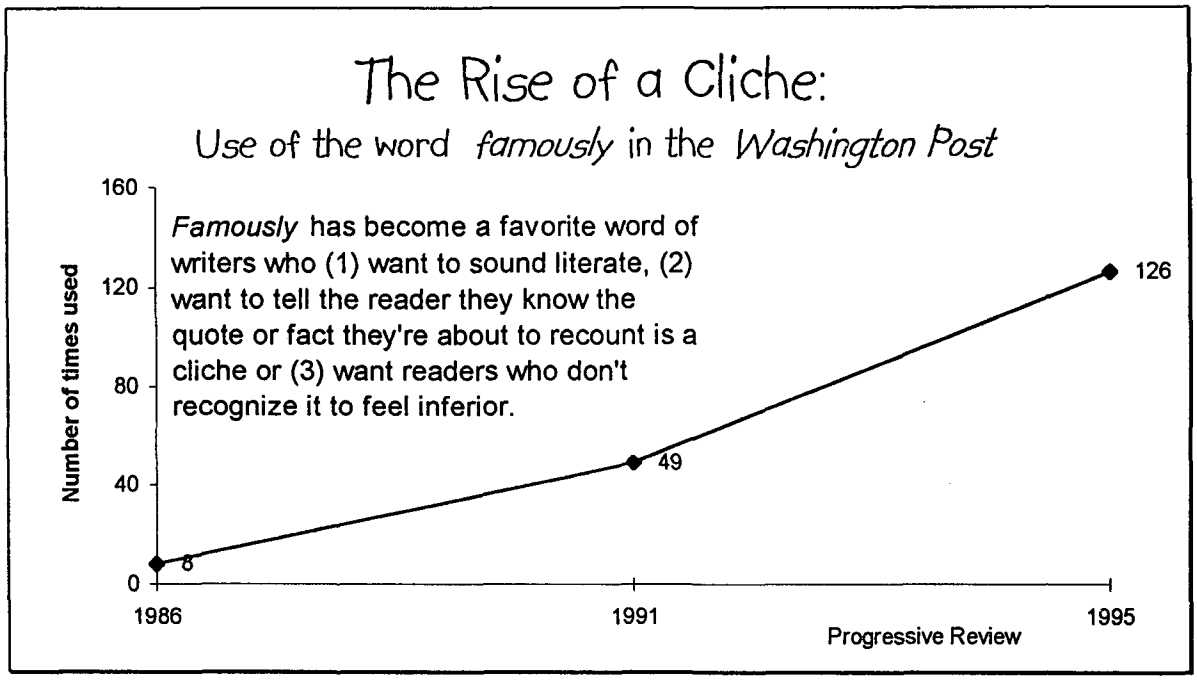
☞ While Clinton may never have inhaled, Roger Clinton is recorded on a police tape during a cocaine drug deal saying that this brother had "a nose like a vacuum cleaner." Bill Clinton was a pal of a leading coke distributor who covered Roger's drug debt and who went to jail for his own drug transactions. Drug enforcement officials have told Roger Morris that they have never known a president with so many associates on their top list of drug suspects.

☞ The White House improperly obtained hundreds of FBI files on Republican officials.

☞ The White House established a secret computer dossier on, according to the latest estimate, some 300,000 individuals and 50,000 organizations. More than 200 staffers had access to the files.

☞ The president, his wife, and assistants have been extraordinarily, and often unconvincingly, unable to recall hundreds of significant events or facts having to do with the various scandals in which they are embroiled.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED


The Rise of a Cliche:
Use of the word famously in the Washington Post
Famously has become a favorite word of writers who (1) want to sound literate, (2) want to tell the reader they know the quote or fact they're about to recount is a cliche or (3) want readers who don't recognize it to feel inferior.
Number of times used
160
120
80
40
0
6
49
126
1986
1991
1995
Progressive Review

Life without the right answers

Strip Nixon's Watergate to its essentials and one found a sleazy and nasty gang centered in the White House. Strip Clinton's Whitewater to its essentials and one finds in the White House a study of what drug prohibition, financial deregulation, the boomer barbarians of law and business, and postmodern politics have done to all of us and to our country. In this sense, Whitewater is a much bigger scandal than Watergate. This time we are all involved.

In Whitewater, at best, we might find our *glasnost*.. We could finally face our joint and several responsibility for permitting so few get away with so much. We could, from what we learn, begin to reorder things.

As things stand now, however, we shall head for the polls with a media that ill-serves us, a White House that deceives us, Republicans who manipulate us and liberals who can find nothing better to do then to deny that anything is wrong.

For a person wishing to leave the polling place with some sense of self-respect this is clearly the worst election since 1968. The Greens, to be sure, offer an answer and one of no small moral appeal. Notwithstanding the quirky and sometimes annoying approach of their candidate, the Nader effort at the very least flies a brave flag of virtue over the barrens of American politics.

But there are those of us who marched under a flag of virtue in 1968 -- casting a third party ballot or none at all. That year we actually may have made a difference, for Nixon won by less than one percent of the popular vote. We did not know then, however, that after our moral action more than half of the American deaths in Vietnam would occur. Learning such things makes you a little more cautious and a little less morally certain.

There is further the argument that one is not just voting for Clinton; one is voting for allowing the children of illegal immigrants to stay in school, for a few dollars more for this program and a few less cuts in that, for keeping the Environmental Protection Agency and protecting endangered species and not making life worse for blacks, latinos, and gays. In the end there is the argument that a Clinton administration will kill and maim fewer people, that the choice lies in the body count -- between mere surgical strikes on human decency and massive carpet bombing. Progressive commentator Saul Landau suggests that one should "enter the polling booth in November, say 'Here's to you Robert Reich,' pull the Democrat lever, shed a few tears and throw up in the street."

Doug Henwood of the *Left Business Observer* thinks not: "Every four years, leftish apologists for the Democrats twist themselves into ever more complex knots to explain why a vote for whatever horror is running under the party's flag is essential."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One reason to vote for Clinton is expressed in the slogan: IF WE DON'T ELECT HIM; WE CAN'T IMPEACH HIM.[1]

This argument is not as perverse as it appears. A Dole victory would stifle inquiry into the dark side of American's recent past. Either or both Clintons might be indicted, but public interest in the larger issues of Whitewater -- including the major issue of drug trafficking -- would diminish markedly.

In fact, even before further action by the special prosecutor there seems to be adequate grounds for impeachment including:

☞ Clinton's public declaration that Whitewater witnesses who did not plead guilty would get his help in raising legal fees. He has even powerfully hinted at pardons for those involved who play it his way. In other words: hang tough and we'll support you; cave in or squeal and you're on your own. In less prominent cases, this is called witness tampering.

☞ The obstruction of various investigations, most notably the Vince Foster case.

☞ The improper acquisition and use of hundred of FBI files on Republican officials.

He points out that the Clinton-signed welfare bill will throw 2.5 million people into poverty and cut the average food stamp allotment to 66 cents a meal. He quotes David Brower as saying, "President Clinton has done more harm to the environment and to weaken government regulations in three years than Presidents Bush and Reagan did in 12 years." And finally he notes that "Clinton's record on civil liberties and privacy issues is at least as bad as Reaganbush's and probably worse."

Henwood concludes that had a Republican president tried what Clinton got away with, "Opposition would have been loud and forceful. With a Dem at the helm, advocates for the poor, the environment and civil liberties have been partly or wholly silenced. And in the likely event of Clinton's reelection, we can probably look forward to the privatization of Social Security. Could Dole get way with that?"

For me, the election's no big deal. Living in DC with its 80% Democratic registration, I get a free and safe protest vote whenever I want. I'll vote for Nader because it's easy. I don't know what I would do if I lived elsewhere. Those in other places where one more vote for Clinton would be merely gilding the kudzu, may wish to follow suit. As for the rest of you -- residing where your choice might actually make a difference -- just do the best you can, remembering that the system is so rigged there just might not be a right answer anyway. -- *Sam Smith*

There goes the neighborhood: the communitarians move in

Thomas S. Martin

One feels a little like Ebenezer Scrooge setting out to critique a movement known as communitarianism. It is only about six years old, having evolved out of discussions over cappuccino at George Washington University and other elite institutions, mostly inside the Beltway. Writing its first comprehensive statement, *The Spirit of Community*, Amitai Etzioni of GWU made himself the guru of the movement. Etzioni compares himself to the Ben Franklin of *Poor Richard's Almanack*. He's right: the moral lessons of *The Spirit of Community*

[1] Another slogan making the rounds is CLINTON '96, GORE '97

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have about as much depth and analysis as "early to bed, early to rise." Etzioni wants to re-create an America that never was: a land where all live by the Golden Rule, no one is poor, unhealthy or gay, and you don't have to lock your door when you walk down the street to say howdy to the neighbors. We have lost this ideal community because we have grown selfish and greedy -- we, the people, that is; our political and economic institutions are not at fault.

Communitarianism has caught the imagination of financially secure and educated segments of American society because it really does raise serious issues, and offers some highly seductive solutions. Al Gore's communitarian "teach-in" on Capitol Hill in 1991 plugged the movement into national politics. The 1992 Clinton campaign addressed many issues from the communitarian perspective without actually using the word -- maybe it sounded too much like "communism." Even the Gingrich generation adopted the communitarian agenda -- and if *that* doesn't make you suspicious, nothing will.

On the other hand, communitarianism does emphasize grassroots organizing, local empowerment, and network over hierarchy -- concepts that are all congenial to the idea of devolution. Indeed much of the communitarian rhetoric seems borrowed directly from devolution's vocabulary. Denotation is not connotation, however. While Etzioni, presidential aide William Galston, and other communitarian advocates appear to support devolutionary goals, such is not really the case. They do not, for example, question the centralized paternal state or its right to define political, economic and even moral standards. Communitarianism has very little to do with individual or local autonomy, and its prophets have never seen a grassroot -- their gardeners take care of that sort of thing.

Consider Jamie Stiehm's 1994 survey of the big names in communitarianism, reported in *The Nation*. Stiehm sent a ten-point questionnaire to seven men and one woman (Etzioni included); two others refused to participate. Stiehm's innocent-looking poll revealed that most communitarian pacesetters send their children to private schools, rarely use public transport, donate blood, attend free public events, or serve on juries. They do, however, use public libraries. All claimed -- not surprisingly -- that they perform "community service," though by this they usually meant editing or writing for journals or (in one case) serving on a synagogue board. Some of the answers were unintentionally revealing. One respondent's most recent attendance at a public event had been a Desert Storm victory parade; another had just been to the opera. "Heaven help us," writes Stiehm, "if we are depending on communitarians to serve as examples of community participation."

A variety of organizations has already spun off from the movement. The Communitarian Network publishes a journal and newsletter, describing itself as "a coalition of individuals and organizations who have come together to shore up the moral, social, and political foundation of society." It is largely funded by multinational corporations like Marriott, and corporate-sponsored lobbies including the National Association of Homebuilders. The American Alliance for Rights and Responsibilities focuses on litigation in defense of social order. It has worked to bar panhandlers from city streets and favors empowering police to stop motorists at random for sobriety tests. Both these organizations are based in Washington, as is Etzioni himself.

Browse us

The Progressive Review has cloned itself on the Internet. With your subscription comes free e-mail updates. But we need your e-mail address. Send it to us at ssmith@igc.org with the word *subscribe*.

You can also find the Review on the Web: *http://emporium.turnpike.net/P/ProRev/*

These and other organizations, such as the Center for Civic Networking at the Kennedy School of Government. have spearheaded the drive for public access to the Internet. They claim to be motivated by egalitarian social concerns, but their own propaganda reveals a not-so-hidden agenda. Richard Civille of the center writes that "a country that works smarter; that enjoys more efficient, less costly government -- guided by a better informed citizenry; that supports job growth through small businesses; that promotes life-long learning -- will be a country laced with a high-speed infrastructure for information with civic purpose." The word "civic" may seem egregiously out of place here until one remembers that it is now used to mean activities supportive of the corporate agenda. The National Information Infrastructure -- both Cyber Al Gore and Laptop Newt Gingrich agree we need it -- will help create more inner-city temporary employees, tie schools ever closer to corporations, and breed a class of workers toiling over computers at home. Loveliest of all, the production costs

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of electronic blips on a hard drive are infinitesimal compared to those of industrial manufacturing.

One can learn everything one wants to know about civic networking, and much else that one may not want to know, from the center's on-line manifesto. According to the center, "civic networking" consists of "grassroots initiatives using information infrastructure to provide civic and community services . . . influencing new state policies which can in turn shape federal communication policy for the 21st Century." The "National Strategy for Civic Networking" begins with an "Executive Summary" -- a boardroom phrase with authoritarian and business connotations perhaps more revealing than the authors intend. The strategy calls for "revitalizing" moribund social institutions and "reducing" the costs of just about everything. The document is replete with business jargon such as "leveraging," "global marketplace," and that hoary oxymoron, "sustainable development." It is assumed without debate that economic competitiveness is a positive value, and that everyone out there wants a piece of the action. Highly paid telecommuters are held up as a model and referred to as "lone eagles."

The vehicle for all this is the bloated Internet of the future that will connect everyone with everyone else, whether we like it or not. Opponents of the corporate infobahn are characterized as "neo-Luddites," a term which -- strangely enough -- is not intended as a compliment.

The cyber-communitarians are right when they burble that the Internet is the true "community" of the future. But take a look at the on-line domain sometime, and decide if this is the neighborhood where you really want to live. Any browse through the Web or the Net will quickly expose you to a bubonic plague of commercial advertisements, mixed in with embarrassingly self-indulgent personal "home pages" and psychotic rants about everything from the Jewish world conspiracy to whether the Bible condemns masturbation. All this will change, no doubt, when the communitarians take over. The gentrification of cyberspace will banish the weirdos. Once we are all plugged into the Net, all sorts of miracles will follow. One is reminded of Charles Fourier, who thought the oceans would turn to lemonade when everyone had joined his socialist utopia.

"Internet mail," writes Civille, "has been found to be a highly efficient means of establishing and maintaining personal acquaintance networks." Yes, you say, but isn't the point of communitarianism a more effective *face to face* human society? Ah, you weren't paying attention. E-mail is cheap and fast, meaning that it augments earnings, reduces business turnaround, and makes more profitable use of times and spaces that are otherwise unproductive. Let's keep our priorities straight.

Civille waxes rhapsodic when he thinks about how the Internet will rescue America's underclass from the shame of the public dole:

> Consider a family with a single mother in a housing project in Chicago. Her name could be Gonzales, Nguyen, Hakim, or Jones. Working part-time she lives with her pregnant 16-year old daughter, a two-year old grandchild and a 17-year old son on probation. They have a telephone and a television -- connected to the net.
>
> The mother switches to interactive health-care programs to learn about her grand-daughters' asthma. ~ Another health care program helps the mother assess a newly discovered mole on her face. ~ Two trips to the health clinic have just been saved -- the taxpayers save money while the mother becomes empowered.
>
> Much interaction with welfare agencies is done over the television set, using a joy-stick to select the appropriate department. ~ The mother's daughter uses the television to participate in a support group of teenage mothers that meet over the network. Her son uses the network to get temporary job assignments in grocery stores around town. ~ In this scenario, computer, television and telephone are merged into one modestly priced consumer electronics device.

I did not make this up, and the author did not intend it as satire. Civille believes that if we all had Internet connections to government agencies, about $10 billion dollars (figured on a half-day of work per person) could be saved. But saved for whom?

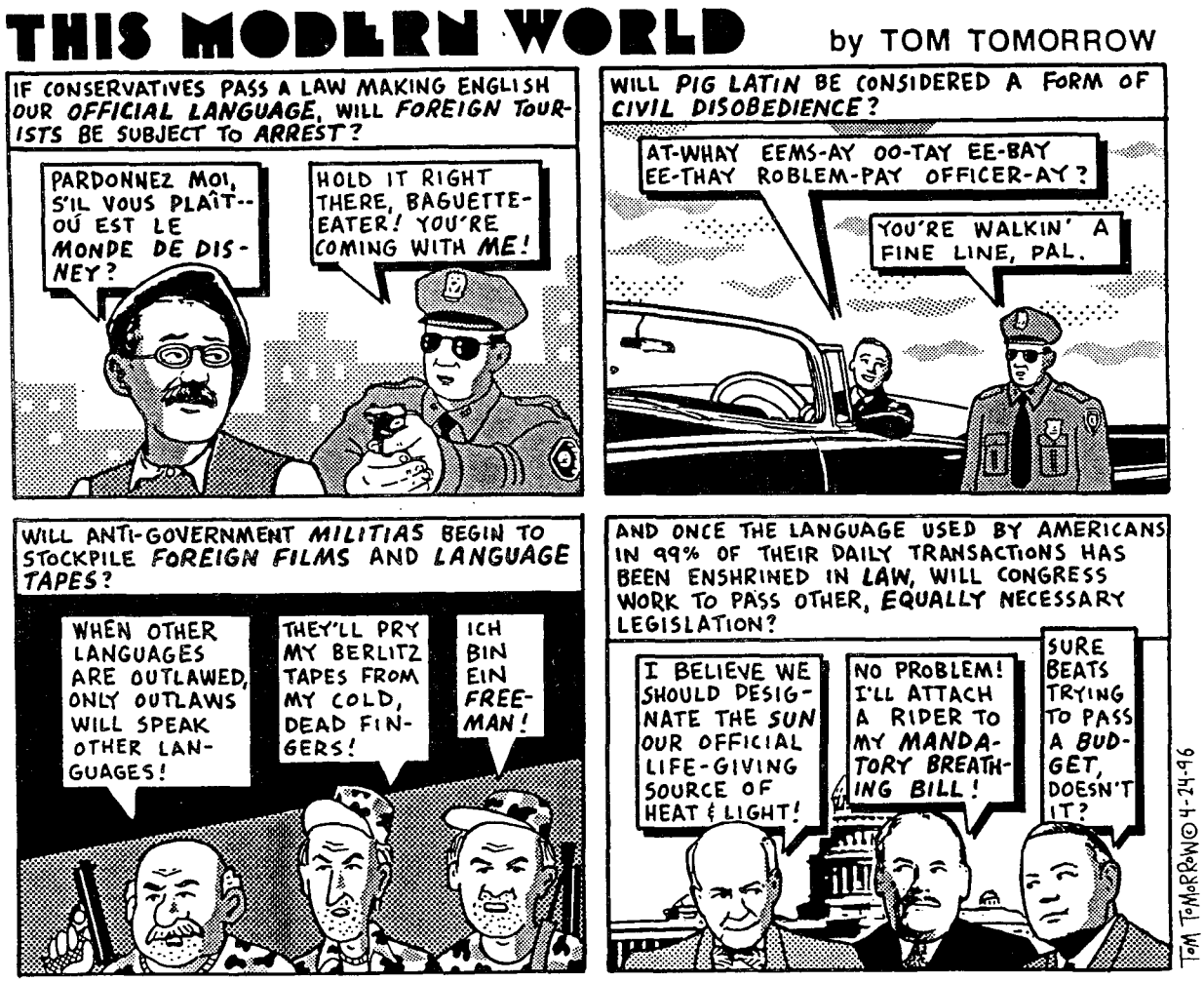
So many genuinely respectable and humane projects are now underway through computer networks that one feels a bit mean-spirited bashing such breathlessly optimistic reports. But let's not lose sight of the bottom line: the communitarian movement aims at co-opting and perverting genuinely grassroots initiatives, turning them toward the service of the corporate mega-state. Its leaders -- or more correctly, its funders -- know that the best disguise for this agenda is social conscience. They hope, probably with justification, that the American public will be too gullible or too dazzled by the buzz-words and technology to see through the veil.

The objective is the homogenization of America into a single consumer culture with the values of the white middle class. If the above quotation does not make this clear enough, consider this one, on community health care:

> individual lifestyle choices can be influenced through acquiring and using dietary information, health center preventive and early diagnostic services such as cholesterol screening and counseling, or finding and participating in support groups offering help with weight control, substance abuse, Alzheimer's, AIDS and other conditions.

In other words, using drugs, being fat or being gay are "lifestyle choices" not conducive to a flourishing capitalist economy. Instead of burning deviants at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED


THIS MODERN WORLD
by TOM TOMORROW
IF CONSERVATIVES PASS A LAW MAKING ENGLISH OUR OFFICIAL LANGUAGE, WILL FOREIGN TOURISTS BE SUBJECT TO ARREST?
PARDONNEZ MOI, S'IL VOUS PLAÎT--OÚ EST LE MONDE DE DISNEY?
HOLD IT RIGHT THERE, BAGUETTE-EATER! YOU'RE COMING WITH ME!
WILL PIG LATIN BE CONSIDERED A FORM OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE?
AT-WHAY EEMS-AY OO-TAY EE-BAY EE-THAY ROBLEM-PAY OFFICER-AY?
YOU'RE WALKIN' A FINE LINE, PAL.
WILL ANTI-GOVERNMENT MILITIAS BEGIN TO STOCKPILE FOREIGN FILMS AND LANGUAGE TAPES?
WHEN OTHER LANGUAGES ARE OUTLAWED, ONLY OUTLAWS WILL SPEAK OTHER LANGUAGES!
THEY'LL PRY MY BERLITZ TAPES FROM MY COLD, DEAD FINGERS!
ICH BIN EIN FREEMAN!
AND ONCE THE LANGUAGE USED BY AMERICANS IN 99% OF THEIR DAILY TRANSACTIONS HAS BEEN ENSHRINED IN LAW, WILL CONGRESS WORK TO PASS OTHER, EQUALLY NECESSARY LEGISLATION?
I BELIEVE WE SHOULD DESIGNATE THE SUN OUR OFFICIAL LIFE-GIVING SOURCE OF HEAT & LIGHT!
NO PROBLEM! I'LL ATTACH A RIDER TO MY MANDATORY BREATHING BILL!
SURE BEATS TRYING TO PASS A BUDGET, DOESN'T IT?
TOM TOMORROW © 4-24-96

stake, now we can bombard them with "information" that will help them see the light.

This and other current analyses of "information poverty" focus on one issue: employability. The widening gap between rich and poor, and the decline of real income in respect to cost of living, is not -- it turns out -- the result of corporate greed, export of jobs and downsizing, but a matter of who does and doesn't have access to the Internet. Will the next generation be computer-literate enough to serve productively in the capitalist marketplace? Can the schools be retooled to churn out these workers? Never mind that employers will consider them just so much "wetware," interchangeable components of the information network. Never mind that access to literature, the arts and philosophy -- those domains that make "civilization" worthy of the name -- are of no concern to the communitarian computerheads, unless of course they can be ripped off for TV commercials.

The "National Strategy" is only one of the communitarian manifestos now circulating in print and in cyberspace, and the new Telecommunications Act is just one example of their impact at the federal level. More important in the long run will be the effects on American education in the new century. All signs now point to the widespread adoption of the communitarian agenda by departments and schools of education, local school boards and teachers' organizations. The educational leviathan moves slowly, and once it adopts a new paradigm, it sticks to it -- sometimes for decades after everyone else has abandoned the stale idea. The gist of the communitarian argument is that schools must teach morals and values. This is hard to argue with, even if Hitler did say the same thing in *Mein Kampf*. The Communitarian Network's "Responsive Communitarian Platform" fields the question before you ask it: "Whose morals are you going to teach?"

Our response is straightforward: we ought to teach those values Americans share, for example, that the dignity of all persons ought to be respected, that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> tolerance is a virtue and discrimination abhorrent, that peaceful resolution of conflicts is superior to violence, that generally truth-telling is morally superior to lying, that democratic government is morally superior to totalitarianism and authoritarianism, that one ought to give a day's work for a day's pay, that saving for one's own and one's country's future is better than squandering one's income and relying on others to attend to one's future needs.

Throughout their propaganda the communitarians insist that values must arise from social consensus, that moral and ethical standards must never be imposed from above. But they also take for granted that some value systems are beyond the pale: for instance, "some communities (say, neo-Nazis) may foster reprehensible values." The self-contradiction is evident even if one agrees that Nazis are reprehensible. The claim is that values "must be judged by external and overriding criteria, based on shared human experience." Any philosophy that believes in "external and overriding criteria" is faced with the question of who gets to identify and interpret those criteria. And we are back where we started, with a ruling elite. While it is difficult to sort out the theoretical underpinnings of communitarianism, it appears that sociobiology is at the heart of this world-view: "Although individuals differ in their needs, human nature is not totally malleable." Certain moral standards are apparently *sine qua non*:

> they must be nondiscriminatory and applied equally to all members; they must be generalizable, justified in terms that are accessible and understandable: e.g., instead of claims based upon individual or group desires, citizens would draw on a common definition of justice; and, they must incorporate the full range of legitimate needs and values rather than focusing on any one category, be it individualism, autonomy, interpersonal caring, or social justice.

What does "nondiscriminatory" mean here? The communitarians do not like non-traditional family structures, anti-authoritarians, or indeed anyone whose values are not Norman Rockwell American. What is a "common definition of justice"? As a recent notorious murder trial demonstrates, black and white Americans might not see eye to eye on this one. And what are "legitimate needs and values" Same-sex marriage? Affirmative action? Integrated schools?

The siren song of the communitarians has already sucked in many progressives and even some radicals. It is dangerous precisely because it is so attractive. Odysseus tied himself to the mast, but we will have to use more analytical tools. Exactly what is wrong with communitarianism?

☞ First, its economic analysis is strictly corporate, capitalist and elitist. It discounts the significance of class and assumes that everyone wants to live like the Nelsons and the Cleavers. The nightmare drug culture of the ghettoes and projects can, for example, be exterminated by teaching "values" and telling parents to stay married and together. "Spend more time with the kids" -- in a world where many kids have one parent who is holding down two jobs and perhaps going to school as well? One is reminded of Nancy Reagan's astonishingly naive "Just Say No" campaign. Charles Derber, writing in *Tikkun*, called this "PMC [professional middle class] communitarianism." He is too generous. The values may be superficially bourgeois, but they well up from even lower circles of hell: the corporate boardrooms and the religious right. The goal here is regimentation and control for the sake of greater profits, make no mistake about it.

☞ Second, the "rights and responsibilities" ethos that lies at the theoretical heart of communitarianism is an atavism. Can we not find a rational balance, it whines, between the rights of the individual and the needs of society? Jefferson and John Stuart Mill could make this one fly, but Etzioni and Galston can't. Our society is not only post-modern but increasingly post-Western, and the emerging paradigm has already called into question the aptness of such dichotomies. Is life really a zero-sum game, in which an increase in rights requires a decrease in responsibilities, or vice-versa? Can we even differentiate clearly between "individual" and "society?" This complex question is currently under deep analysis, particularly by ecological philosophers. They have tentatively concluded that rights and responsibilities as currently defined make no sense in a holistic, interconnected world where everything causes everything else. Some entirely new basis for deciding what one should and shouldn't do may be required. The communitarians are perhaps aware of this, and wisely choose to evade the issue with the platitude that what one has a "right" to do may not necessarily be the "right thing" to do morally -- hate speech, for example.

☞ Third, and most decisive, is a simple practical issue: communitarianism is still an academic movement. In spite of all the politicians who have jumped on the bandwagon, it shows no sign of moving out of the ivory tower and down onto the street -- into the "bowling alleys and taverns," as Derber writes. From the bowling-alley perspective, many of its earnest proposals are laughable at best, and insulting at worst. Unpaid parental leave? Mandatory drug or AIDS testing for everyone? V-chips in every television set? Laptops for the homeless?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The communitarian ethos has been expressed by some famous people as, "ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." The easiest way to establish and maintain the necessary social control is by placing the burden on the victims. It is the fault of the "American people" (whatever that is) that America is in such a mess; now the people must humbly accept the guidance of the think tanks, and take greater responsibility for preserving a social order in which corporate ambitions can thrive. We must learn to think of ourselves as cells in the social organism, and if our actions do not conduce to the organism's health, we must expect to be slapped down.

The mission of the communitarian elite echoes a dangerous world-view that runs wide and deep through the history of Western civilization: namely, the doctrine that people are not capable of governing themselves. However disguised, it is an attack on liberal and progressive values, assuming a Hobbesian view of human nature: left to our own devices, we will murder and rape one another. We will not arrive at a communitarian utopia unless we are led there by the hand. Some sovereign power, not our own common sense and certainly not our habits of cooperation learned over hundreds of millennia of evolution, is required to keep us in line. The fact that this view has been less powerful in America than elsewhere does not diminish its threat -- indeed, it enhances the peril, since we are not in the habit of vigilance.

Weather Report

Drug busts

Drug czar Gen. Barry McCaffrey has urged amnesty for public officials and others who once used drugs. McCaffrey wants prior drug use to no longer be a political campaign issue, saying, "Drug use was a generational thing, and we should just accept that and move on." McCaffrey was far less clear about current drug use by non-baby boomers -- such as young black males. They will apparently still not be allowed to just move on. While hundreds of thousands of Americans are charged annually for simple possession of drugs or are denied employment on the basis of drug tests, McCaffrey said, "If a person has a drug use problem past or present, or is addicted, currently or recently, there is still a place for him in politics or the workplace. If you haven't used drugs for a year, and you've disavowed that behavior, then you've rejected drug use." This statement -- on its face at odds with his own administration's drug policy -- may suggest some coming modification in that policy. On the other hand, McCaffrey may simply be providing cover for significant past and present drugs users in the White House and elsewhere in the administration.

If you want to stop the use of illegal drugs, stop the use of legal ones. That's one conclusion that can be drawn from a government survey that found that 25% of heavy drinkers also used illicit drugs, while only 2% of non-drinkers did.

Just politics

As a sign of just how deep federal Washington has sunk, The *Washingtonian* magazine, a local trend-pusher, ran a lengthy and apparently unedited story by lobbyist Bob Juliano who whined,

> The lobbying business has gone to hell in a hand basket. Ever since that damned gift ban became law this year, lobbying has changed, and not for the better. ~ Shutting down lobbyists is the worst thing that Congress could have ever done to itself -- and to the American people. ~ Think about it. What does this town run on? Information, that's what. And who provides most of it to the people who make the decisions? Lobbyists, that's who.

All over town *Washingtonian* readers were undoubtedly nodding their heads in agreement, glad that at long last someone had honored the unsung heroes of the Capitol hallways, the men and women who really make this city work. But, suggested Juliano, it could be too late. He says that thanks to restrictions on lobbying in Washington, he may be moving his business "where the real action is these days -- and where lobbyists still have a legitimate voice -- to the state houses." You have been warned.

Land of the free

Over 19,000 law enforcement agencies around the country can tap into the files of the National Crime Information Center and their 24 million records. There has been increased interest in NCIC in the wake of White House abuse of FBI records. Two years ago, the GAO questioned whether adequate auditing was being done of the way the files were used. Like any computer files, hackers can obtain data, law enforcement officers can use material for personal or other illegal reasons, and drug lords can bribe their way into access. It is now clear that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the files can also be used by politicians with authority over law enforcement agencies.

Field notes

Open space conferences: Tom Atlee, writing in the current issue of *Yes!,* tells of attending a week long open space conference at which there were "no keynote speakers, no schedule of workshops, no panel discussions, no organizational booths." Instead, anyone who wanted to create a discussion or activity announced their proposal, chose a time and place and posted it on a wall. In 40 minutes, some 60 workshops had been posted, and the 175 attendees sorted themselves out among them. Writes Atlee, the sessions were "more highly organized than the best planing committee could possible manage. It was also chaotic, productive and fun." Conferees "soon developed an intense spirit of community that was all the more remarkable considering we were all doing exactly what we wanted." *For more on open space conferences you can order Open Space Technology from Harrison Owen, 301-469-9269.*

Road signs

Number of the 9,553 electronic surveillance requests by the FBI in the past ten years that related to arson, bombing or firearms: 19. [Nadine Strossen, ACLU]

Number of wiretap requests turned down by federal judges since 1988: None. [Scripps-Howard]

Percent of two million phone calls intercepted in 1995 that were relevant to criminal prosecutions: 18%. [Electronic Privacy Information Center]

Drop in drug use by those youth involved in Big Brothers/Big Sisters programs compared with those that aren't: 46% [Center for Substance Abuse Research]

Amount Wisconsin spends on cash welfare payments to the poor each year: $300 million. Amount it spends on tax breaks for business each year $1.1 billion. Amount it will subsidize a new Milwaukee Brewers' stadium: $160 million. [Ralph Nader]

Amount Reebok pays Indonesian workers to make shoes: 16-20 cents an hour. Hours these employees work per day: 10 [AFL-CIO]

Amount Gap pays El Salvadoran teenage girls to make T-shirts: 16 cents a shirt. Hours worked per day: 18 [Rainbow Coalition]

Number of new housing units that could be provided in US if just one accessory flat was added for each 1,000 homes: 48,000 [Planning consultant Patrick Hare, Washington DC]

THE PROGRESSIVE REVIEW
1739 Connecticut Ave NW
Washington DC 20009-8922

**Use this form to subscribe,
renew or
change your address**

[ ] One year $18
[ ] Two years $32
[ ] Foreign one year $28
[ ] Contribution enclosed $_____
[ ] Please correct my address at right

Mail with check to address above

SUBSCRIBER NEWSLETTER

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED